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THE BRITISH IN INDIA



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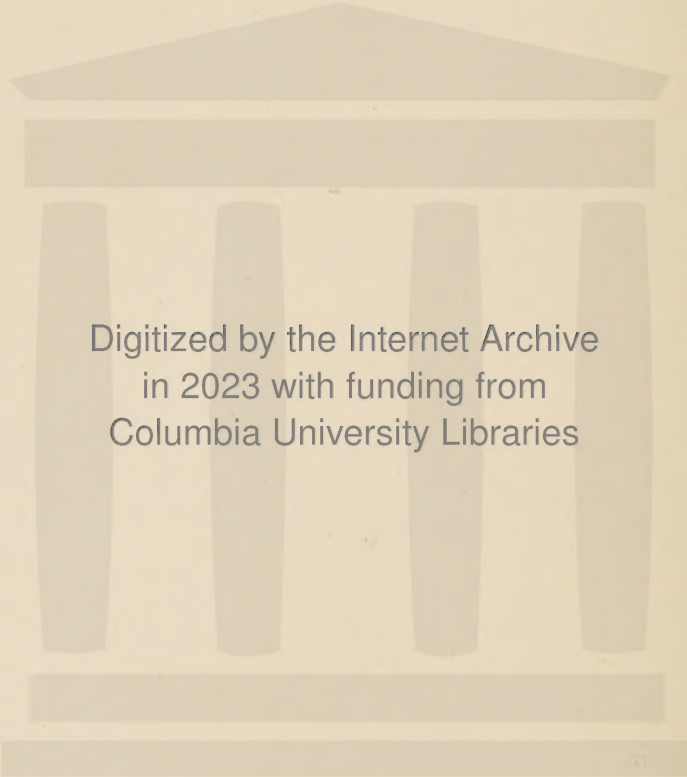


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THE BRITISH IN INDIA



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The British in India

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India and Pakistan, August 1947

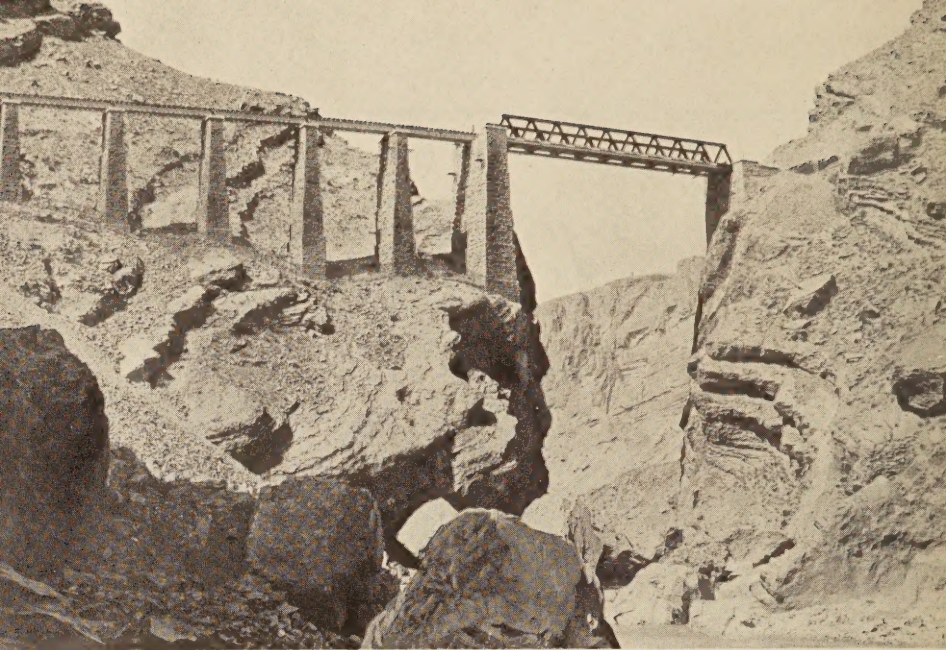
I. THE ACT

Never before in the history of the world has a transfer of power been effected on such a scale, as when on August 15, 1947, the British rule in India came to an end and two new nations — India and Pakistan — shouldered the burden of responsible self-government.

By the Indian Independence Act, the British Government freely gave over control of the subcontinent of India, and four hundred million people — or one-fifth of the people of the world — achieved recognition of political maturity by consent rather than by force.

Thus from the lands that cradled what may have been the most ancient civilization on earth emerge two of the youngest nations in the modern world.

* * *



*A railroad bridge in Rajputana . . .
and the Post Office in Calcutta*



II. THE ASSETS

The two new Dominions, as they face the beginnings of their own future, are not without assets from the years of British administration.

They have the material basis of a modern state, with a well-planned system of communications — telegraph, telephone, and postal services. They have a railway system already nationally owned and managed, which covers 41,134 miles and employs over 700,000 men, and which makes a substantial annual contribution to public revenues.

They have three things essential for government: first, the personnel of an efficient, non-political civil service with more than a hundred years of experience behind it; second, a tax structure; and third, a sound tradition of public finance.

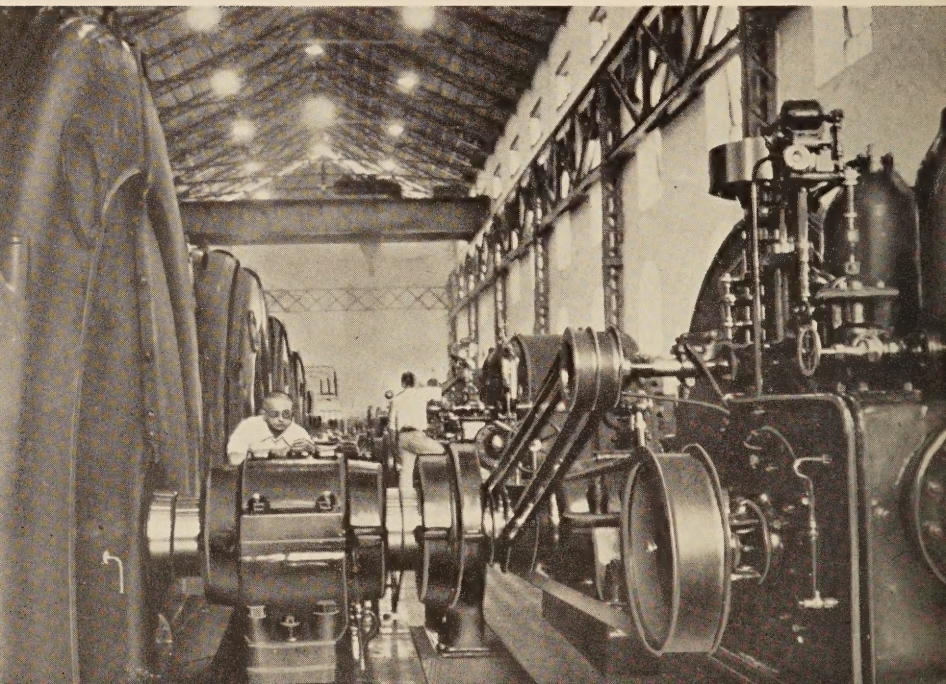
With the largest irrigation system in the world (covering over 70 million acres) they have already available the means to develop their agriculture; with two and a half million industrial workers, backed by modern labor legislation and a growing trade union movement, they can continue to build up their production; and they have an established foreign trade with the machinery in existence to support it — banking, insurance, and suitable codes of commercial law.

And already well begun is the process of change in the rigid structure of ancient traditions that will permit the growth of public health projects, education, and scientific research. There are already 230,000 schools and colleges equipped to teach by modern methods, and a large body of men and women trained in the professions.

All these things will contribute to the two new Dominions' future as modern states. Their cultural heritage, too, has been safeguarded by the British administration through the preservation of historic buildings and the discoveries made by the Archaeological Survey of India.



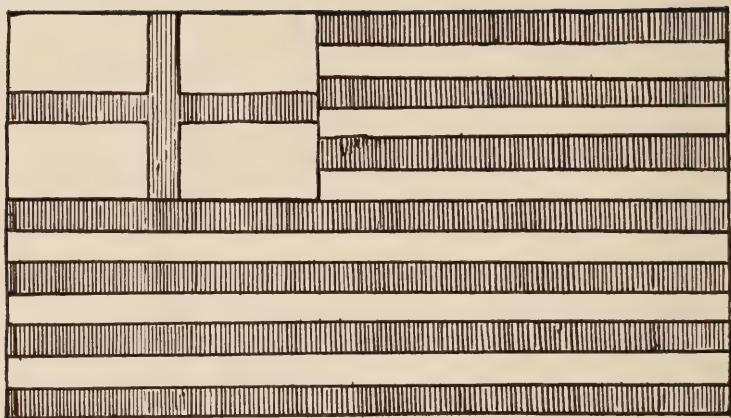
Part of a great Indian hydro-electric system



III. THE HISTORY

The story of Britain and India begins in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. At that time the sea-route to India was controlled by the Spaniards and the Portuguese, but in 1583 four English merchants made the hazardous overland journey to Delhi to the Court of the Great Mogul, Akbar. The Queen's ambassadors and consuls took no interest in trade; this was the responsibility of the traders themselves who were expected to protect their own consignments of goods and their own ships. In September, 1599, a group of a hundred merchants met together in London and subscribed £30,000 as joint capital to trade in the East, and on December 31, 1600, they were granted a Royal Charter as the East India Company. From this Company grew the Indian Empire.

Trade was the sole purpose of the East India Company. It had no intention whatever of acquiring territory. For fifty years it followed the advice given in 1615 by Sir Thomas Roe, who served at the Court of the Mogul Emperor and was the first English official in India: "If the Great Mogul would offer me ten forts I would not accept of one. . . . Let this be received as a rule, that if you will profit, seek it at sea, and in quiet trade." But this rule for "quiet trade" was made difficult. For nearly a century before the arrival of the English the Portuguese had held command of the Indian Ocean, and it was not



The flag of the East India Company

until a series of naval defeats that they conceded to the English the right to share the west coast trade. The East India Company won favor with the Mogul by giving protection to Moslems journeying by sea from India to Mecca; but still the rule against the acquisition of territory held good until, in 1639, one of the Company's agents, Francis Day, obtained land from a neighboring rajah in order to build a fort. Day was severely censured by the Company; but in due course one of the greatest English forts, Fort St. George, was built there, and around it grew the prosperous city of Madras. Much the same happened with the historic city of Bombay, which came into British control when it was given by the Portuguese as part of the dowry of the Portuguese princess who married King Charles II. The lease was then ceded by the King to the East India Company, who accepted the responsibility very reluctantly because of the rental of £10 which they would have to pay. Bombay became eventually the chief center of British trade in the East.



One of the beautiful buildings of India, the Gate of Victory at Fatehpur Sikri, built by the Emperor Akbar



Robert, Lord Clive

With the disintegration of the Mogul Empire toward the end of the seventeenth century, however, it became necessary for the Company not only to fortify its trading posts but to draw up alliances with separate Indian rulers. This they did, partly to maintain order, and partly to offset their most formidable trade rivals, the French. By 1757, the military genius of Robert Clive, a junior servant of the East India Company, had broken French power, and within a century British influence extended over the whole of India, either by direct control, or through treaties and alliances with Indian rulers.

By 1833, when the East India Company applied for a renewal of its Charter, the role that England was playing in India had grown and changed to such an extent that the British Parliament could declare:

“The interests of the native population are to be consulted in preference to those of Europeans, whenever the two come into competition.”

The new Charter Act provided that no native of India or other subject of the British Sovereign should be debarred by race, color, or religion, from holding any office whatsoever. Speaking in defense of the measure in the House of Commons, the great historian Macaulay foreshadowed events to come when he said:

“It may be that the public mind of India may expand under our system until it has outgrown that system; . . . that, having become instructed in European knowledge, they may, in some future age, demand European institutions; whether such a day will ever come, I know not. But never will I attempt to avert or retard it. Whenever it comes, it will be the proudest day in English history.”

It would be going too far to say that the British Cabinets in the nineteenth century had in their minds any deliberate design for arriving at the day when Indians should have European institutions. It was not until 1917 that this policy was defined. Nevertheless, during the sixty years before 1917 the need to win the co-operation of Indians in the business of government and the pressure of liberal opinion in England combined to secure the steady development of Indian administration.

The Development of Self-

	CENTRAL GOVERNMENT	
	EXECUTIVE	LEGISLATURE
1861 Indian Councils Act	Viceroy Council of 5 all British	Legislative Council 12 government officials, British 6 non-officials, appointed, Brit & Indian
1909 Morley-Minto Reforms	Viceroy Council of 7 1 Indian 6 British	Legislative Council 27 <i>elected</i> members, Indian 36 government officials, British 5 non-officials, appointed, Ind
1919 Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms	Viceroy Council of 7 3 Indians 4 British <i>(The provisions of the 1935 Act, which would have federated British India with the Indian States ruled by the Princes, never came into force.)</i>	Council of State (Upper House) 34 elected members: 32 Indi 2 British 20 government officials: 3 Indi 17 British 6 non-officials: 5 Indian, 1 Brit
1935 Government of India Act	<i>(The provisions of the 1935 Act, which would have federated British India with the Indian States ruled by the Princes, never came into force.)</i>	Legislative Assembly (Lower Hou) 105 elected members: 97 Indi 8 British 26 govt. officials: 5-10 Indi 21-16 British 14 non-officials: Indian
1946 First All-Indian Viceroy's Council	Viceroy Council of 14 all Indian, representing major Indian parties	Council of State and Legislative Assembly (practically as above)
1947	INDIAN IND	

Government in British India

PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS		
EXECUTIVE	LEGISLATURE	
Governor	Legislative Council at least half the members appointed non-officials, mostly Indian	1861 Indian Councils Act
Governor Executive Council including 1 Indian	Legislative Council some elected members, who with non-official appointees outnumbered government officials	1909 Morley-Minto Reforms
(Dyarchy) Governor Executive Council Indians and British; some portfolios trans- ferred to Indians	Legislative Councils with a majority of elected members	1919 Montagu- Chelmsford Reforms
(Provincial autonomy) Governor All-Indian Council in charge of all portfolios	Legislatures with a majority of elected members; in some provinces a Legislative Assembly and a Legis- lative Council	1935 Government of India Act
As above; 1935 rights continue		1946 First All-Indian Viceroy's Council
INDEPENDENCE ACT		1947

In 1858, rule by the East India Company ended and the British Crown assumed sole responsibility for the government of India. A Secretary of State for India, in London, and the Viceroy in India were made responsible to the British Parliament.

There followed the Indian Councils Act of 1861, which was the first of five milestones on the road to development of self-government in India. This development is most easily understood by examining the chart on the previous page.

In 1917, E. S. Montagu, then Secretary of State for India, defined British policy. Speaking in the House of

An open air school

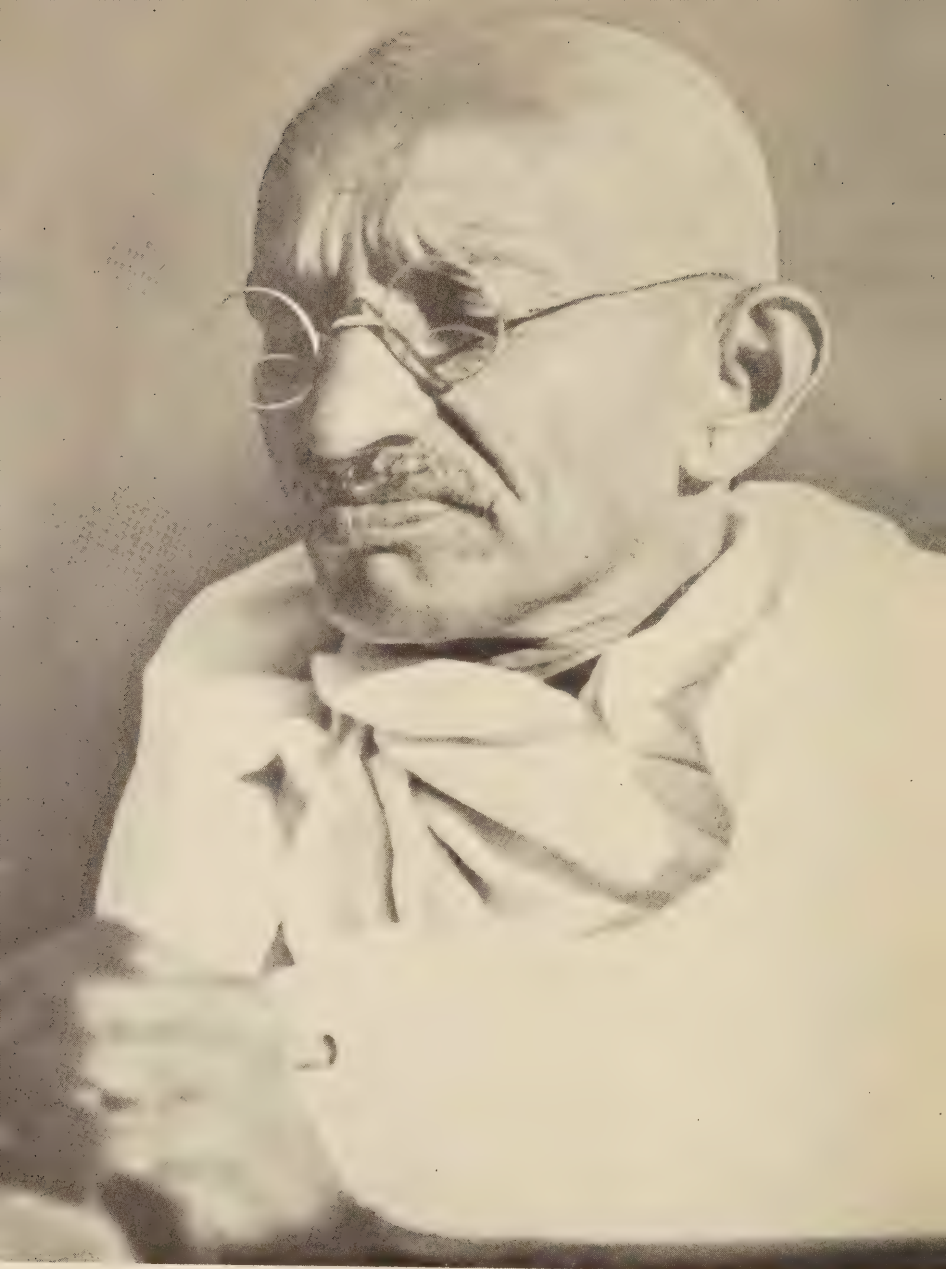


Commons, he said it was: "the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration, and the gradual development of self-governing institutions, with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India."

In the thirty years between this statement and the Indian Independence Act of 1947, this policy was followed consistently by successive British governments, Liberal, Conservative and Labor.

The Minto-Morley Reforms of 1909 had brought elected Indians into the Legislative Council, and an Indian member into the Viceroy's Executive Council. Montagu's declaration of 1917 jumped forward several stages at once by recognizing that any progress in India must be toward responsibility; the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919 were the first practical step toward that responsibility, when in the Provinces Indian ministers assumed control of education, health, agriculture, and similar nation-building activities.

* * *



Gandhi

IV. EVENTS LEADING TO THE ACT

Provincial self-government as outlined in the Government of India Act of 1935 began in 1937, but negotiations with the Princes of the Indian States concerning federation were suspended by the outbreak of war in 1939.

By 1939, two conflicts had been going on simultaneously in India, for a good many years. The first was between the British Government and the Indian Nationalists about how and when India was to govern herself; the second was between Hindus and Moslems, and was concerned with the way in which the power should be transferred in Indian hands.

The Congress Party, or Indian National Congress, was founded in 1885 under British initiative as a forum for the discussion of social and cultural problems, but subsequently grew and changed. It is by far the largest and best organized of India's political parties today; at its meeting in 1940, it had a registered membership of six millions, but its influence extends far beyond its actual members.

The Moslem League is exclusively Moslem in composition. It was founded in 1906, and by 1946 claimed to have a membership of ten million.

From 1940 on, the Moslem League demanded the partition of India, and the formation of a Moslem state,

Pakistan, from areas with a Moslem majority. The Congress Party was strongly in favor of the unification of all India.

By 1942, the internal situation in India had become of grave concern to the British Government in view of the imminence, as was then thought, of a Japanese attack.

The Congress Party was withholding co-operation in the war effort, on the grounds that they were deprived of any share of political power, and that British proposals for progress toward Indian self-government were unsatisfactory and, in particular, included no promise of independence.

The Moslem League was nervous lest Britain should appease the Congress Party at its expense, though like the Congress Party it demanded an immediate share of political power.

Though the eleven Provinces of India were for practical purposes self-governing, India as a whole was still ruled by the Viceroy, who was responsible to the British Parliament. It is true that he was advised by an Executive Council with a majority of Indians in it, and that the advice of the Council was practically always taken, but the fact remained that the Indians in the Executive Council, unlike the members of the Legislature, were not representative, and they did not belong to either of the two chief political parties.

To meet this situation in 1942 came the Cripps Mission, headed by Sir Stafford Cripps, a member of the British War Cabinet with plenipotentiary powers to act on behalf of the Government.

The Mission offered to form, immediately, an Executive Council composed of representatives of Indian political parties, and promised to convene, as soon as the war



Jawaharlal Nehru

was over, a constituent assembly of Indians, to frame a new constitution which would include the right to leave the British Commonwealth were that the wish of Indians.

These proposals were rejected by all Indian parties for conflicting reasons, and until just before the end of the war there was a complete deadlock between Indian Nationalists and the British Government.

As the war drew to a close, the problem which faced Britain was a twofold one:

First, and short-term, was to find some way of associating the Congress Party and the Moslem League in an

interim government which could see India safely through the difficult period while her final constitution was being hammered out.

Second, and long-term, was to set up the machinery for framing the new constitution on a basis that would enable all parties to co-operate in the work.

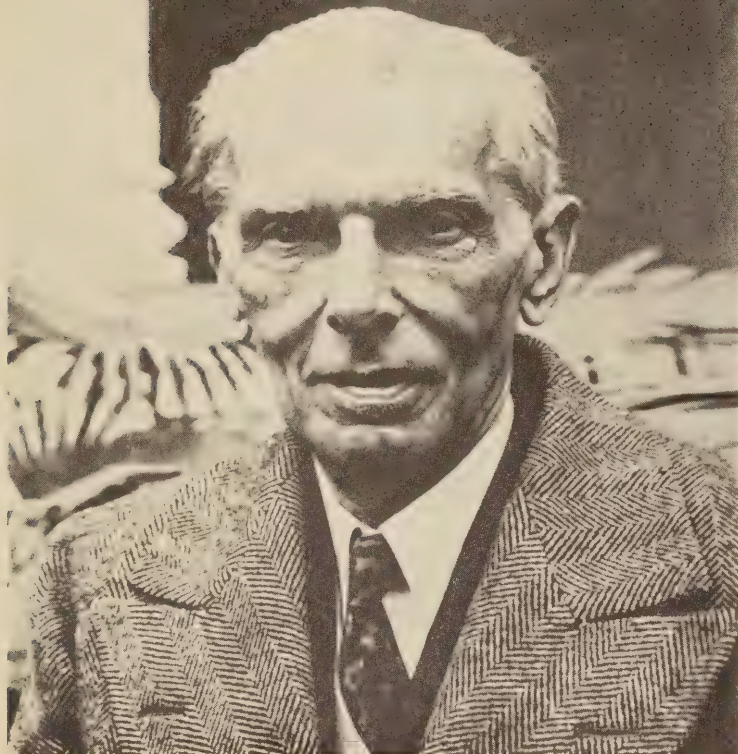
The main difficulty was the opposed views of Indians about the final form of the new India — whether there should be partition or unification.

In June, 1945, the Viceroy, Lord Wavell, called a conference of political leaders at Simla to deal with the short-term problem, but they failed to reach any agreement.

In September, 1945, the British Government turned to the long-term problem, and announced that new elections would be held in India, both for the Central and Provincial Legislatures. As soon as the election results were known, the Viceroy would consult the newly elected members about the best way to set up a constituent assembly to draft the new constitution.

In the elections the Congress Party and the Moslem League fought on the respective platforms, diametrically opposed, of Union for All India, and Partition into two separate states — Hindustan for the Hindus and Pakistan for the Moslems. Minor parties were practically wiped out, and the Moslem League could justly claim that almost all Moslems had voted for Pakistan, while the Congress Party could claim that almost all other Indians had backed Union.

Elections were over early in 1946, and Britain announced that three members of the British Cabinet would go to India to help the Indian political leaders set up



M. A. Jinnah

their constitution-making body, and form an interim government.

The three Cabinet members were Lord Pethick-Lawrence, Secretary of State for India; Sir Stafford Cripps, President of the Board of Trade; and Mr. A. V. Alexander, First Lord of the Admiralty.

The Cabinet Mission spent several months in India and held lengthy conferences with political leaders. At first they tackled the short-term problem, and tried to get the Congress Party and Moslem League leaders to serve together on the Viceroy's Council, but they failed to achieve any agreement.

On May 16, therefore, they offered an outline solution for the long-term problem. They proposed that the Central Government should be a loose federation of the Provinces of British India and the Princely States. The federation would deal with foreign affairs, defense, and communications and leave all other matters to be the concern of the Provinces and States. They further proposed a grouping of Provinces and States to administer subjects of common interest within the federation. This meant that the Moslem areas would be able to form a government to deal with all questions except foreign affairs, defense, and communications.

After considerable discussion, and after the Moslem League had first accepted and then rejected these proposals, the Viceroy invited Jawaharlal Nehru, then President of the Congress Party, to submit a list of names for the Viceroy's Council. Mr. Nehru did this, and on September 2 the first All-Indian Viceroy's Council was sworn in, with all portfolios including Finance, External Affairs and War held by Indians.

After further negotiation, the Moslem League was persuaded to accept the Viceroy's offer, and in October, 1946, League nominees joined the Council.

The Constituent Assembly met early in December, 1946, to draft a new constitution, but the Moslem League delegates refused to attend.

In another effort to break the deadlock by shock tactics, the British Government announced on February 20, 1947, that the transfer of power into responsible Indian hands would be made "by a date not later than June, 1948."

Meanwhile, there was mounting antagonism between the communities and imminent danger of civil war. Lord Mountbatten, who had succeeded Lord Wavell as Viceroy,



Lord and Lady Louis Mountbatten

conveyed a further offer from the British Government on June 3, 1947. He offered immediate Dominion Status, a scheme to see India through the dangerous interim period. Those Provinces and Districts with a Moslem majority were to vote on the question of the partition of India, and, on the basis of the vote, two new Dominions, India and Pakistan, would be set up. The June, 1948, date would be anticipated and power transferred at an earlier date.

When this was settled, both new States would become separate, sovereign Dominions of the Commonwealth.

The leading parties accepted this offer, and the British Parliament passed the Indian Independence Act which made the historic transfer of power and created the new Dominions of India and Pakistan.



“ . . . future happiness and prosperity.”

V. CODA

The King is no longer Emperor of India.

No Act of the British Parliament passed after August 15, 1947, has any validity in either Dominion.

There is now no Secretary of State for India in London.

British commercial interests operate under exactly the same conditions as Indian firms; they have no safeguards or special privileges.

British troops began the withdrawal from India on August 17, 1947, and Britain retains no defense bases on the subcontinent.

Only one constitutional tie remains between Britain and the two new Dominions; that tie is membership in the British Commonwealth of Nations through allegiance to the British Crown. It is a temporary tie, inasmuch as it can be severed at any time by either India or Pakistan.

Mr. Attlee, the Prime Minister, expressed Britain's attitude, when, speaking in the House of Commons, he said:

"I hope that India may elect to remain within the British Commonwealth. . . . If, on the other

hand, she elects for independence, in our view she has the right to do so. It will be for us to help to make the transition as smooth and easy as possible."

And so the two nations entered upon self-government. The future now lies in their own hands. And, in the words of His Majesty the King's message of August 15, 1947:

"I know that I can speak for all sections of opinion within the British Commonwealth when I say that their support will not fail you in upholding democratic principles. I am confident that the statesmanship and the spirit of co-operation which have led to the historic developments you are now celebrating will be the best guarantee of future happiness and prosperity."

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